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I practice trauma stewardship to be effective for my patients in their time of need.

By Lt. Claudia Cespedes, Naval Hospital Naples

A native of Denver, Colorado, I'm the youngest of 11, and first in my family to join the military and pursue a doctorate degree.

While completing my Master's Degree in Forensic Psychology at the University of Denver in 2010, I simultaneously worked with asylum seekers and trauma survivors, that's really when I developed my passion for trauma and resilience work.

In fact, that led to my interest in joining the U.S. Navy in 2013. I wanted to do all that I could to help our nation's heroes who were suffering from combat stress, traumatic brain injuries, PTSD and other trauma. At the same time, I realized that the need went beyond military in combat, but to health professions delivery care—from corpsman delivering care on battlefields to physicians and nurses caring for the sick and injured at shore-installation here at home.

My first duty station at Naval Medical Center San Diego was where I finished my clinical training. In July 2014, I received my Doctorate Degree in Clinical Psychology at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

I arrived to U.S. Naval Hospital Naples in October 2014 and have been actively involved as the division officer for the Behavioral Health Department and the Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP). With help from an incredible team, I developed several psychoeducational and trauma groups as a way to increase mental health resources for the local community; a therapeutic avenue that had been lacking for over five years.

As the SARP Licensed Independent Practitioner, I've been passionate about promoting alcohol education through outreach and prevention strategies in order to keep alcohol related incidents low and the community safe. Our team's compassionate care and commitment our family of patients is aimed at helping them regain a sense of agency and empowerment, ensuring that our active duty members are mission-ready at all times, and that their family members are taken care of so they can focus on operational needs.

My completion of the Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape (SERE) School in September 2014 led to me becoming a SERE Certified Psychologist. To maintain the skills needed to support reintegration and decompression activities for DoD military, civilian, contractor and other designated personnel, I participated in two SERE Phase II Reintegration drills at U.S. Naval Hospital Rota, Spain. I also provide SERE mentorship to a psychologist working on her certification process, and she provides secondary coverage for the primary SERE Psychologists within the U.S. Africa and European commands.

Working for Navy Medicine has been a true blessing, and the perfect opportunity to serve those who have often lost faith in themselves. I practice trauma stewardship to be effective for my patients in their time of need. Mitigating the effects of vicarious trauma is only possible through consistent self-reflection and support from others. I am fortunate to have that mutual support from my Navy Medicine family.

In honor of Mental Health Month, we are promoting the idea of "caring for the caregiver," because so often, providers can forget about caring for themselves while tending to the traumas of others. I encourage all clinicians to find all available resources to learn more about the impact of vicarious trauma, and find ways to be effective as caregivers. I practice trauma stewardship to be effective for my patients in their time of need.

I'm Lt. Claudia Cespedes. I am Navy Medicine.